

Washington, D.C. - Congressman James Oberstar (MN-08), Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, joined Congresswoman Melissa Bean for a tour of EJ&E rail line, which could see a 400 percent increase in traffic under a proposed purchase by Canadian National Railroad (CN).

Oberstar praised Bean's leadership on the issue, which could have broad impacts on the region's transportation, including significant delays to already congested arterial roads. Bean opposes the sale.

"Congresswoman Melissa Bean and I met with mayors, business leaders, and community representatives of at least four of the communities along the proposed CN/EJ&E route," Chairman Oberstar said. "It is bluntly obvious that a wide range of issues remains unresolved, and even unaddressed, in this proposal. The Surface Transportation Board should require the railroad to respond to a wide range of public safety, public health and school transportation issues. Noise, vibration, and other environmental effects have been raised as concerns as well. If these communities raise these issues with the STB, Congresswoman Bean will support them, and I will join her in appealing for more intensive consideration of these issues."

Oberstar toured several of the grade crossings that would see increased rail traffic. Local mayors and emergency personnel presented him with a summary of the increased dangers their communities will face under the proposal. Bean said she appreciated the Chairman's visit and his attention to the concerns of suburban Illinois residents.

"The Chairman's deep knowledge of transportation issues has been an asset in my fight against this proposal and I appreciate his input and advice," Bean said. "As this situation develops, I will continue to keep him informed of our communication with the Surface Transportation Board."

Bean has taken several steps to combat the proposal since CN announced its plans to purchase the EJ&E rail line in October 2007. CN has estimated freight traffic will increase on this line from 5 freight trains per day to about 20 per day through numerous suburban municipalities. The proposal is under review by the Surface Transportation Board (STB), which has the authority to approve or disapprove the sale.

Last month, Bean initiated a bipartisan joint letter from suburban members of the Illinois delegation to the STB opposing CN's proposal and listing the serious concerns of local residents. That letter followed a similar joint message from Bean and Senator Dick Durbin.

At Congresswoman Bean's request, the STB began the environmental review of the transaction. During the initial phase to determine scope of the impact, the STB saw an unprecedented turnout at its public meetings, with nearly 3,700 total comments received.

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